

Review article

SUCCESSFUL ORGANIZATIONS DRIVEN BY EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

Alan Šišinački, Senior Executive, Gornji Rabac 7a, 52221 Rabac, Croatia
Telephone: +385 99 2682 550, e-mail: alan.sisisinacki@gmail.com

Boris Dobiš, PhD, ACC (ICF), Coach, YPnet, s.r.o.
Podjavorinskej 2, 81103 Bratislava, Slovakia
Telephone: +421 910104236, e-mail: boris.dobis@ypnet.eu

Jelena Šišinački, PhD, Research Fellow, Opatijska 12, 52221 Rabac, Croatia
Telephone: +385 98 944 0540, e-mail: jsisinacki@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Employee performance evaluations provide a lot of opportunities for employers and employees. Benefits for organisation and support of inclusive organizational culture are rather obvious, but consistent system that is fully understandable and acceptable to all stakeholders is required. Key stakeholders that should be involved in development of tailored employee performance evaluations are employees and employee representatives, unions, HR department, team leaders and middle management, management team members and board members. Involvement of key stakeholders and their “buy-in”, clear communication on performance evaluation process and its profound understanding supported by a robust and consistent training plan for all stakeholders are crucial elements for success. Employee performance evaluation should be developed for each organizational context or at least adjusted to specific needs of the organization to reflect company culture, its vision and values, set of competencies and skills, business requirements, and previous experience with employee performance evaluations. It should cover two main performance aspects: The reflection on direct performance itself (WHAT: hard SMART KPIs) and the HOW dimension (employee’s behaviour). Obviously, it is very difficult to develop a system that is completely excluding the subjective perspective of the supervisor as well as the subjective perspective of the employee that is being evaluated, but the focus is on developing and implementing different tools in order to minimize the subjective element of performance evaluations. Important elements of successful performance evaluation system are a well defined regular process of revision by representatives of key stakeholders to capture and reflect on users’ feedbacks, integration of new elements of expected behaviours and competencies, or simply reflection on new challenges and mutual expectations in business environments. With organisational maturity and acceptance of employee performance evaluation system, organisation can start further developing important elements: supervisor

performance evaluation based on 360° perspective as e.g. a part of an employee satisfaction survey. Additional employee engagement survey also provide a useful feedback on real quality of the introduced performance evaluation system.

Keywords: *employee performance evaluation; 360° perspective method, KPI*

1. INTRODUCTION

When setting up a company, the idea is to make a successful business, i.e. to provide a high level of quantity and quality of work performed. In order to achieve expected goals, a few requirements need to be met and the most important one is to have motivated employees who understand tasks that have to be fulfilled and are able to execute them.

Each year the company is setting up goals and strategies how to achieve them, while managers need to convert those goals into tangible results. Through performance process managers receive an efficient tool that will help them to assess, monitor and control as well as revise strategies.

Employee performance evaluation can be defined as assessment and review of employee's job performance. The idea of introducing evaluation process is to identify improvement areas that allow the employees to do their jobs more effectively. When there are significant gaps between the skills the employees possess and the skills needed to perform well, training can be designed to help close those gaps (SIOP, 1998, p. 3).

In a traditional employee performance evaluation, the manager would report on employee's contributions at work on an annual basis, indicate his/her weaknesses and consequently discuss them with the employee. In some companies managers would require employees to write a self-evaluation that is quite critical for performance rating as managers cannot know what task their employees are performing on a daily basis (Heathfield, 2016). Contrary to the traditional employee performance evaluation, in a modern employee performance evaluation managers continuously observe and coach employees, as well as compare and adjust their performances with ongoing company business.

When performing employee performance evaluation, two quantified methods can be implemented as introductory indicators:

- **Personnel data:** It is a method of recording the withdrawal behaviour of employees, such as absences. However, personnel data do not reflect employees' performance and needs to be upgraded with further methods.
- **Objective production:** Under this method direct data is used to evaluate the performance of an employee, such as sales figures, production numbers, etc. However, one drawback of this process is that the variability in performance can be caused due to factors outside employees' control. Also, the quantity of production does not necessarily indicate the quality of the products (Heathfield, 2016).

Attached to introductory indicators, a performance appraisal focuses on benchmarks to more accurately promote constructive criticism. It includes:

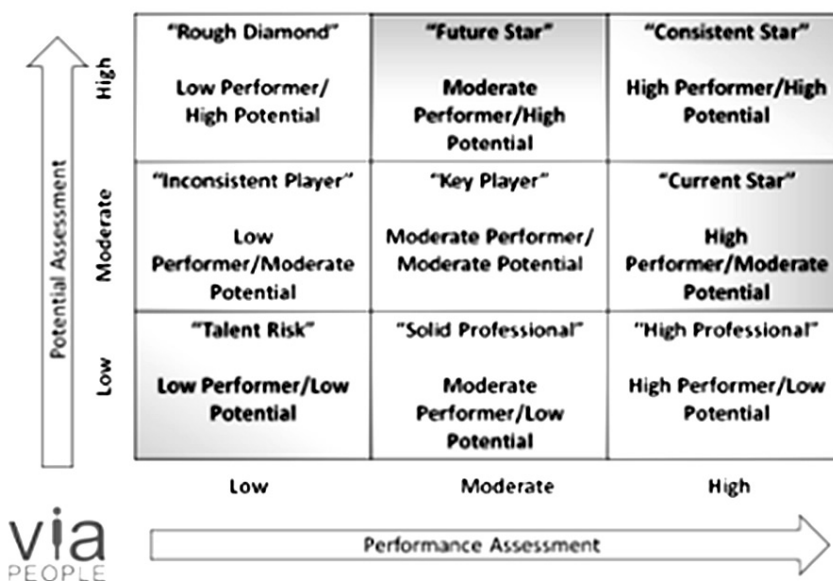
- **Graphic rating scale:** Graphic rating scales like Gauss distribution are the most commonly used performance-evaluation systems.
- **Employee-comparison methods:** Rather than subordinates being assessed

against pre-established criteria, they are compared with one another. This method eliminates central-tendency and leniency errors but still allows for halo-effect errors to occur.

- **Behavioural checklists and scales:** Supervisors record behaviours which they judge to be job-performance relevant, and they keep a running tally of good and bad behaviours and evaluate the performance of employees based on their judgement.
- **Peer and self-assessments:** Peer assessments and self-assessments are used to paint a clearer image of performance. Managers are often less aware of employee efficacy than team members or other peers. In self-assessments employees have the right to underline what they think their performance is, and why certain metrics may be misleading (Heathfield, 2016).
- **360 degrees feedback:** 360 degrees feedback refers to feedback on an employee's performance being provided by the manager, different people or departments an employee interacts with (peer evaluation), direct reports, and the employee himself. This type of feedback includes employee-generated feedback on management performance (also known as upward appraisals).

Following *9 Box Chart Matrix* is an example matrix that summarizes results of various implemented employee performance evaluation methods. Based on evaluation results it categorizes employees by two variables: their performance ranking and their potential for advancement.

Chart 1. The 9 Box Matrix



Source: Groehler, L. (2012). The Succession Planning 9 Box: A Powerful Tool To Be Used Wisely.

The *9 Box Matrix* is one of the most widely used tools in succession planning and leadership development. It can be a valuable tool for anyone who works in talent management, or for any manager as a way to assess and differentiate a team or organisation (McCarthy, 2015).

In the following chapters we will explain the method of employee performance evaluation that we have mostly used in our practice – analysis of key performance indicators (commonly known as KPIs) through SMART technique and behaviour evaluation. Furthermore, we have made a summary of our experience in application of employee performance evaluation in different European countries as well as in different organisational structures.

2. HOW TO MEASURE EMPLOYEE EVALUATION?

The purpose of employee performance evaluation is not only to manage the specific expectations the employers have from their employees, but also to create positive working atmosphere that enables and supports employees' self-motivation to perform efficiently and effectively so that finally a win-win-win situation can be achieved for all parties concerned (employee ↔ employer ↔ stakeholders).

Being exactly aware of WHAT and HOW to do and WHAT HAPPENS IF brings to all involved a good portion of transparency that finds its reflection in predictability of the near future. This kind of certainty is interpreted by human brain as a reward (Rock, 2008) that strengthens the intrinsic self-motivation.

Moreover, a mature employee performance evaluation system is a useful tool for implementing the company's vision, mission, values and current strategy that reflects its culture.

Comprehension, transparency and unambiguousness are perhaps the most important features of a sophisticated performance evaluation which starts with the definition of WHAT and HOW should be performed.

When defining the WHAT, setting clear performance goals appears to be simple. However, the real quality of performance targets defined can be SEEN and FELT when making an in-process check, and their hardest test comes with the final performance evaluation that usually has a tangible impact on employee's financial reward.

A reliable, and the most well-known goal-setting technique used when defining the key performance indicators (KPIs) is SMART (Doran, 1981; Chart 2). It helps organise employees' efforts to improve their chances of success.

Chart 2_Goal-setting Technique smart – Acronym Explanation

	Doran's Original Criteria	Some Other Alternatives in Use (Source: Internet)
S	Specific Targeting a specific area for improvement	
M	Measurable Quantifying, or at least suggesting, an indicator of progress	
A	Assignable Specifying who will do it	Agreed-upon Achievable Attainable Ambitious
R	Realistic Stating what results can realistically be achieved given available resources	Relevant (when achievable / attainable)
T	Time-related Specifying when the result can be achieved	Timely Time-based Time-bound

Source: Doran, G. T. (1981). "There's a S.M.A.R.T. Way to Write Management's Goals and Objectives, Management Review, 70(11).

As explained in Chart 2, SMART provides a clear and simple framework for defining and managing goals and objectives. It says specifically what an employee should focus on. This approach reduces the risk of a vague or unclear goal that is unlikely to be achieved.

In some specific situations, not all 5 elements of SMART can or need to be incorporated when setting an effective goal or objective. As Doran says: *"It should also be understood that the suggested acronym doesn't mean that every objective written will have all five criteria"*, i.e. not everything achieved can be directly or exactly measured.

Now that the WHAT has been exactly articulated, let us have a look at HOW the expected performance should be accomplished.

As already mentioned, there is a set of values established by the company which need to be applied in the everyday business operations by all employees. Understanding and holding up these values can be recognized in employees' behaviour while performing the SMART goals and objectives.

Concerning the employee performance evaluation, it needs to define the desired employee behaviour first, then observe their real behaviour, and finally, evaluate to what extent the observed behaviour meets the requirements of the desired behaviour.

This can be done with the help of a check-list as shown in Chart 3.

Chart 3 Employee Behaviour Evaluation – The how Check-list Example

Company Value / Behaviour Desired	Behaviour Observed	Extent Level Rating 1 – 5*	Remarks
Company Value 1 Behaviour Desired 1	Description of behaviour observed		
Company Value 2 Behaviour Desired 2	Description of behaviour observed		
Company Value 3 Behaviour Desired 3	Description of behaviour observed		
* Extent Level Rating: 1 – not at all, 2 – to a small extent, 3 – to the extent expected, 4 – to a great extent, 5 – to a very great extent			

Source: Authors' own data sheet analysis.

To avoid assessor's bias, it is advisable to model the behaviour evaluation process in the same way as SMART, i.e. by defining and describing the respective behaviour extent levels (1 – 5). These descriptions are a consistent part of the Check-list.

The SMART goals and objectives, at least some part of them, may be very specific for each individual employee. It is important to understand that all of them relevantly contribute to achieving the planned company business results.

In contrast to goals and objectives, the company values remain the same for all employees within the company. The way how to live and show them (behaviour desired) is once again specific for each position.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF EMPLOYEE EVALUATION

Having defined the SMART goals and objectives and transformed the company values into desired behaviours, the implementation process of employee performance evaluation system can start.

In this process, mutual open and regular communication between managers and their team members is of highest importance. Defining and fixing SMART KPIs may require a certain negotiation period as they are expected to be challenging and attainable at the same time.

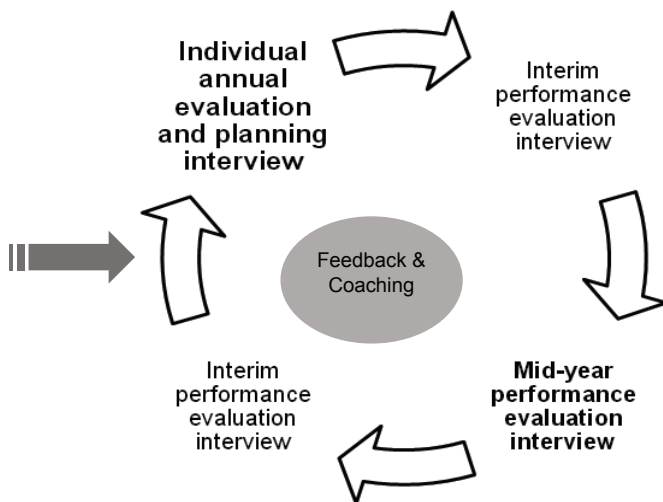
Explaining the company values and behaviours desired, the managers must understand and be able to exercise them. Managers are the role models when talking about the behaviours they want to observe in their employees. The performance and behaviour presented by managers is the essential basis for employees' buy-in success.

In harmonisation with the business plan, the SMART KPIs supported by desired behaviours are defined for a one-year period. This is presented in an *Individual Annual Evaluation and Planning Interview (IAEaPI)*. The main purpose of this interview is to evaluate employee's performance in the past business year, including their realized development – if applicable, to agree on SMART KPIs and desired behaviours for the coming/current* business year, as well as to identify the areas of potential improvement concerning their competencies and skills, and finally, to plan the respective development measures. Prior to the interview itself, it is advised to ask the employee to make a self-assessment concerning their performance in the past business year. Comparing employee's self-assessment with manager's performance evaluation is a good indicator for how SMART the defined goal-setting a year ago was – the smaller the difference, the SMART-er last year's goals and objectives must have been.

The outcome from this *Individual Annual Evaluating and Planning Interview* is a kind of *Annual Contract* between the manager and his employee for the coming/current* business year, as well as employee's financial and/or non-financial rewards reflecting their performance in the past business year. (*The results for the past business year are available in the following current business year.)

A regular in-process check is an important precondition for achieving the goals and objectives defined. For the employee performance evaluation process, it means to repeatedly invite the employee to an *Interim Performance Evaluation Interview*. Depending on the business context, these interviews can be held on monthly, quarterly or, at least, on a semi-annual basis. They are a useful management and leadership tools and help avoid painful surprising situations in the final IAEaPI. Feedback and coaching is the effective communication approach applied in these sessions (Chart 4).

Chart 4: Performance Evaluation Cycle



Source: Authors' own performance analysis.

Some companies run the evaluating part and the planning part of the IAEaPI in two different sessions.

As stated at the beginning of this Chapter, implementation of the employee evaluation system is the first communication issue between the manager and his or her individual team members.

A tough communication topic is the impact stemming from the results of the employee performance evaluation on employee's financial and/or non-financial rewards. The RULES for WHAT HAPPENS IF (APPRAISAL RULES) should be understandable, transparent, clear and FAIR. In companies with union organisations, these Appraisal Rules are a part of the Union Contract negotiation process.

Perceived unfairness is interpreted by human brain as a threat (Rock, 2008) causing a deep demotivation. That explains why the design of generally accepted Company Appraisal Rules deserves a solid time investment and subsequently a professional communication approach.

Due to the permanently changing business environment, even the best employee performance evaluation system should be constantly improved and further developed. A direct feedback on it can be retrieved from the individual interviews mentioned above. Additional inspirational pieces of information can be collected through various employee satisfaction and engagement surveys, as well as leadership/management of 360 degrees feedback. Targeted focus groups can also deliver precious inputs.

4. PERFORMANCE EVALUATION AND OBJECTIVITY

For the last decade we have been implementing different employee performance evaluation methods in various industries and cultures. Looking back, our experience is that employee performance evaluation process advantages as well as challenges are the same (or very similar) wherever and whenever the system is implemented.

Meaning that no matter the geographical or cultural environment, maturity or complexity of the organisation, similar advantages and challenges will be met.

To put it simply, people will be people regardless of the company and they appreciate to be involved in processes that directly impact their pay and their development as well as contribute to bigger goals and be fairly treated during the whole process.

Employee performance evaluation system is probably one of the most sensitive systems the management can introduce due to the fact that it impacts every employee in several areas:

Direct impact on their compensation (variable compensation, bonuses, rewards, annual salary appraisal etc.)

Annual assessment of behaviours in correlation to defined list of competencies and values impacts their growth opportunities, promotions and development/training plan based on Individual development plan

Unfortunately, our experience is showing that employee performance evaluation is not always 100% objective. The major challenge is how we can ensure minimum subjectivity and maximise objectivity throughout the whole employee performance evaluation process resulting with increased trust in the system, engagement and motivation of employees and consequently increasing efficiency of the whole system.

It is important to mention that partially subjective approach might be demonstrated for different reasons not only by the supervisor but also the evaluated employee or even the union representative. Therefore it is necessary to implement different tools and invest extra efforts in involving, informing and supporting each of the mentioned stakeholders in order for them to get the opportunity to fully understand, support and promote the system.

Besides the already mentioned SMART approach, there are several tools that could contribute to the objectivity of the process:

Early involvement of all stakeholders

In order to increase acceptance rate and trust in the process, it is important to involve all stakeholders (management, employees, unions, employee representatives, HR, etc.) so they can contribute, participate and understand the process before it is implemented. In case where a company can ensure a critical number of “*internal ambassadors*”, it is likely that employees will have a tendency to trust the system and be engaged in continuous system improvement through their involvement, observations and proposals.

Constant communication and training of all employees ensuring full understanding of the process and their roles and responsibilities throughout the evaluation process

It is crucial to have a simple, understandable and regular communication regarding the employee performance process. Process, criteria and deadlines should be clearly communicated to the employees ensuring and confirming full understanding of the process before the start of the *Individual Annual Evaluation* meeting.

Training and development of managers and team leaders

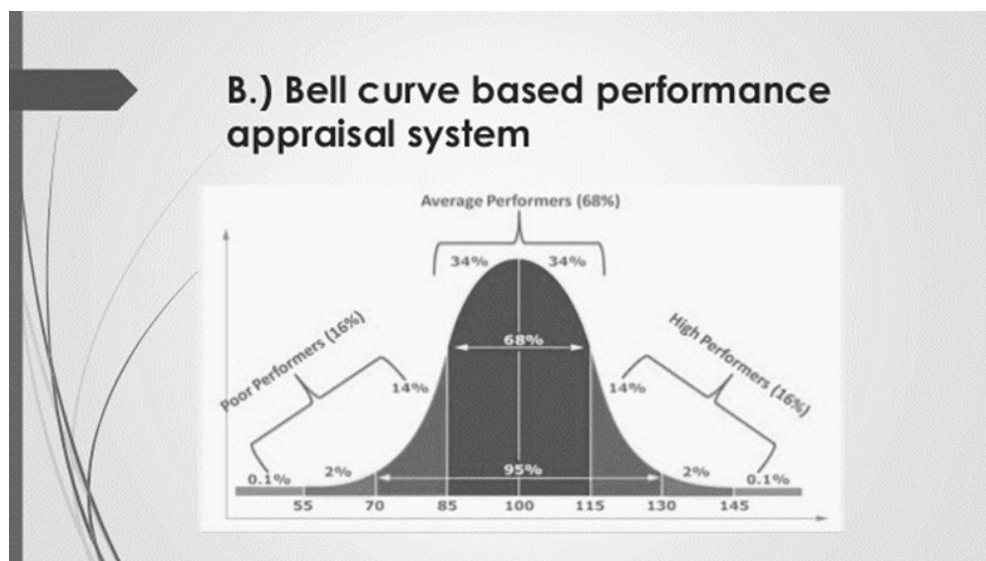
Even if the top management understands, prepares and implements all elements in the best possible way, “the moment of truth” happens when the supervisor meets the employee. Therefore, it is important to ensure as much as possible that supervisor has full understanding of the process in order to be able to explain and answer all possible questions the employee might have. It is also important that the supervisor demonstrates appropriate behaviour based on understanding of the system and respect of the employee.

Implementation of Gauss curve (normal distribution) to avoid difficult discussions related to fair and objective evaluation across the company

Surely, it is easier to evaluate and communicate good or excellent performance. Some managers and team leaders dislike giving negative feedback and will inflate their workers' ratings to avoid difficult conversations or to make his/her department look good up against his peers. Other team leaders often have double functions being team leaders and executing the job together with his/her direct reports. In all these situations it is not easy to objectively and fairly evaluate every direct report across the company.

One of effective tools to maximize objectiveness and fairness of evaluation process across the company is implementation of mandatory use of Gauss curve principle (for all statistically relevant teams with more than 30 members). That would mean that every supervisor with more than 30 direct reports has to follow Gauss curve principle (normal distribution curve) with parameters defined ahead (Chart 5). Defined parameters can be evaluation grades from, for example scale 1-5 (1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest grade) and team/company might define following normal distribution: 10% of employees population to be evaluated as the lowest and 10% as the highest grade (1 and 5), 15% graded 2 and 4 and remaining 50% good performance (grade 3) (1-10%, 2 – 15%, 3 – 50%, 4 – 15%, 5 – 10%).

Chart 5 Gauss curve (normal distribution example)



Source: Katavić, I. i Šišinački, A. (2017). *Menadžment* (Power Point Presentation). Zagreb: University College of Economics, Entrepreneurship and Management Nikola Subic Zrinski.

Employees rated with performance 1 (10% of lowest performing employees in the company) for one or more years would either have the chance to improve in the following year through agreed *Individual Development Plan* or, in some companies, most of them would have to leave the company. Moreover, employees rated from 2-5 would have their own *Individual Development Plan* further building on their strengths and/or working on defined areas for improvements. For employees rated with performance 4 and especially 5 for a few consecutive years, their potentials for growth, development and promotion should be reviewed.

In all scenarios, it is expected that discussions with employees, feedback and specific actions from *Individual Development Plan* will drive improvements of individual employees' performance resulting with improvement of the whole organisation in the following years and fulfilling constant increase of expectations (efficiency, customer satisfaction programs, quality improvements, other stakeholders' expectations, etc.).

- "Calibration or alignment workshops" can significantly increase objectiveness and credibility of the evaluation process

Not less important, supervisors, especially in complex organisations, might have different criteria for evaluation and while one would consider that his or her direct reports perform an extraordinary job, other supervisors with higher expectations would evaluate their job only as average comparing it with performance of his/her team members.

In addition, in case of leading a team smaller than 30 direct reports it is obviously not rational that the defined normal distribution can always be followed. In that case, the hierarchically higher management level is responsible for ensuring that when consolidating smaller teams which his/her direct reports are leading, consolidated result respects the defined normal distribution.

This process is organised through the so called *calibration or alignment workshops* where different supervisors (leading smaller teams) present evaluations with explanations to their peers and their manager. During that process all supervisors align on evaluation benchmark in order to achieve objective and fair evaluation with defined normal distribution. "Calibration or alignment workshops" should be organised for all management levels with final workshop that CEO organises with his/her direct reports and their teams and confirms the agreed normal distribution across the company.

It would be highly recommended to involve representatives of unions and/or worker representative in definition of evaluation criteria and process of calibration meetings in order to understand drivers, reasoning and final benefits of the calibration process. This would increase transparency and trust of all stakeholders in the calibration process and performance evaluation in general.

- Fast and efficient response to potential complaints or reports on subjective or unprofessional evaluations

Understanding that there is no 100% objective evaluation, system management is responsible for involving all stakeholders in focusing on maximisation of objectiveness, continuous improvement process and general increase of trust in the system. It is necessary to ensure the process that will encourage all stakeholders to continuously report on experienced practice and potential improvements, to analyse all collected inputs and ensure fast and efficient response with specific corrections and improvements. Employees could report potential issues, concerns or potentials for improvements through confidential phone line or mail address, focus groups, individual interviews or indirectly through worker representatives or unions.

- Annual After Evaluation Review Process

Annual After Evaluation Review Process should be a structured process involving different stakeholders in order to review reported issues, proposals and documented experiences. Outcome of mentioned workshop will ensure documentation of key discoveries with specific actions that will further improve the next year evaluation process.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Satisfied and motivated employees are the key element for success in business. In order to obtain the maximum from its employees, it is recommended to implement

various models of employee performance evaluation which will ensure that expectations and achievements are well tuned.

At the beginning of the business cycle, each employee should clearly understand overall company and personal goals, how she/he should achieve them, what knowledge and performances will be evaluated and how. Stakeholders involved (employees, union, supervisory board, worker representatives) should agree on all details regarding performance evaluation.

And yet it will always be a very delicate process as total objectiveness cannot be obtained while its results have a direct impact on salary, variable parts of salary, bonuses, promotions etc. (Katavić, Šišinački, 2017, p. 95).

Moreover, business organisations are very dynamic; employees come and go, business goals change, and consequently employee profile changes. In this ongoing process it is necessary to ensure good monitoring process and reassess and update development plans on the regular basis.

Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric Company once said: *“There are only three measurements that tell you nearly everything you need to know about your organisation’s overall performance: employee engagement, customer satisfaction, and cash flow. It goes without saying that no company, small or large, can win over the long run without energized employees who believe in the mission and understand how to achieve it.”* (Weil, 2015).

Ocjena učinkovitosti zaposlenika kao pokretač uspjeha organizacije

Alan Šišinački, menadžer, Gornji Rabac 7a, 52221 Rabac, Hrvatska
Telefon: +385 99 2682 550, e-mail: alan.sisinacki@gmail.com

RNDr. Boris Dobiš, ACC (ICF), konzultant i trener, YPnet, s.r.o.
Podjavorinskej 2, 81103 Bratislava, Slovačka
Telefon: +421 910104236, e-mail: boris.dobis@ypnet.eu

dr. sc. Jelena Šišinački, znanstveni suradnik, Opatijska 12, 52221 Rabac, Hrvatska
Telefon: +385 98 944 0540, e-mail: jsisinacki@gmail.com

SAŽETAK

Primjena metoda za ocjenjivanje učinkovitosti zaposlenika pruža niz prilika za organizacije i zaposlenike. Koristi za organizaciju i općenito organizacijsku kulturu prilično su jasni, no potrebna je ustrajna primjena sustava koji je razumljiv i prihvatljiv svim dionicima. Ključni dionici koji moraju biti uključeni u razvoj i primjenu sustava za ocjenu učinkovitosti zaposlenika jesu: zaposlenici, predstavnici zaposlenika, sindikati, odjeli upravljanja ljudskim resursima, vođe timova, srednji menadžment, menadžment i uprava. Uključivanje ključnih dionika kao i njihova aktivna participacija, jasna komunikacija vezana uz razumijevanje procesa te konzistentan plan razvoja ključni su čimbenici uspjeha. Važno je da se prilikom razvoja sustava za ocjenu učinkovitosti zaposlenika vodi računa o specifičnim potrebama pojedine organizacije koji će odražavati organizacijsku kulturu, viziju i temeljne vrijednosti, te poslovno okruženje i potrebe organizacije. Uz to, mora uvažavati eventualno prethodno iskustvo s primjenom sustava za ocjenu učinkovitosti zaposlenika. Ocjenjivanje učinkovitosti zaposlenika trebalo bi obuhvatiti dva osnovna aspekta: 1. Izravni učinak zaposlenika (ŠTO ili SMART KPI) te dio koji se odnosi na ponašanje zaposlenika (KAKO). Kod ocjenjivanja učinka zaposlenika potrebno je naglasiti da je izrazito teško razviti sustav u kojemu je moguće u cijelosti isključiti subjektivnu komponentu vrednovanja supervizora kao i subjektivnost samog zaposlenika kojeg se ocjenjuje. Stoga je bitno da se razviju i primijene različiti alati kojima se minimizira subjektivnost u vrednovanju. Bitan element uspješnosti primjene sustava za ocjenu učinkovitosti zaposlenika jasno je definiran proces revizije implementiranog sustava od strane svih dionika, kontinuirana nadogradnja sustava novim elementima koji odražavaju očekivana ponašanja i kompetencije ili jednostavno reflektiraju nove prilike i očekivanja u poslovnom okruženju. Razvojem organizacije te prihvaćanjem sustava za ocjenu učinkovitosti zaposlenika, organizacija može početi razvijati i primjenjivati sljedeće važne elemente evaluacije: procjenu učinkovitosti menadžera i voditelja metodom 360°, kao na primjer sastavnog dijela Istraživanja zadovoljstva zaposlenika. Dodatne povratne informacije o kvaliteti primjene sustava za ocjenu učinkovitosti zaposlenika omogućuju nam informacije o stvarnoj kvaliteti i uspješnosti primjene sustava za ocjenu učinkovitosti zaposlenika.

Ključne riječi: ocjena učinkovitosti zaposlenika; metoda 360°, KPI

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